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THE REVOLT OF ISAAKIOS KOMNENOS: Reconsideration

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The purpose of this study is to examine the validity of Prof. Inoue's view which stresses the role of the byzantine aristocrat's *olkos* (household organization which includes the estates and the retainers) as a driving force of the rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos. I have a number of doubts about Prof. Inoue's view. First, is it possible to argue that the regular army was opposed to the aristocrat's private soldiers? Secondly, had the aristocrats' groups of private soldiers the same close connection to the management of aristocrat *oikos*? If anything, they seem to have been connected to aristocrats' position as high-ranking military officials. It seems more likely that they formed a small guard corps around the aristocrats' role as high-ranking military officers rather than being formed through their connections with the aristocrats' estate management. If this is the case, then thirdly, it is doubtful whether they had the military strength to determine the success of the rebellion as a separate entity from the state armies. Finally, as a fourth problem, we need to examine if, as Prof. Inoue says, the sheer number of private soldiers was main cause determining the importance of rebel leaders, and whether such a condition became the basis of Skylitzes' selection when he named the rebel families.

Our final conclusion is that the number of aristocrats' private soldiers was not the decisive factor in selecting the leaders of the revolting armies. The rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos was the one of generals who could mobilize military forces stationed in Asia Minor. The precedence of leaders in the rebellion greatly depended on their careers in the state apparatus, such as their honorary titles and past military exploits. On the other hand, we could not determine any evidence that the scale of their household was considered.

Keywords: Byzantium, the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople, Isaakios I Komnenos, Byzantine Aristocratic Families

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Introduction

In 1057, generals from Asia Minor dissatisfied by the cold treatment of the emperor Michael VI (r.1056-1057) rose in revolt against the imperial government of Byzantium. The rebels took power after they defeated the imperial troops and forced Michael VI to abdicate. Isaakios Komnenos, whom the rebels had selected as their emperor, formally ascend to the throne (=Isaakios I Komnenos, 1057-1059).

For this political change, past studies have concentrated on locating the rebel leadership in history. For instance, G. Ostrogorsky has located them in the Asia Minor military aristocrats' resistance to the civil aristocrats' government of Michael VI.¹ On the other hand, S. A. Katerinos considers this case in terms of a counteroffensive from the aristocracy, both civilian and military groups, to Michael VI, who had attempted to exclude the power of aristocrats.² In addition, according to J.-C. Cheynet, it was a confrontation of an imperial government that controlled the Balkans and the Midwest region of Asia Minor, and rebels that were based in eastern Asia Minor.³

These research results can be quickly seen to share in common an emphasis on the struggle for power between the imperial government and the revolting aristocrats. On the other hand, it was generally believed that, as far as the forces the rebelling aristocrats led were concerned, forces stationed in Asia Minor were mobilized on a large scale.

To such a theory, a novel view was presented by Prof. K. Inoue.⁴ He stresses the role of the aristocrat's *oikos* (household organization which includes the estates and the retainers) as a driving force of the revolt. Conversely, the role of the regular army remained limitedly in his view. In evidence, he discusses the fact that Katakalon Kekaumenos, one of the leaders of the rebels, took pains to mobilize the state army and succeeded in it only by a stratagem, and that Bryennios trying to obtain his soldier's respect, was suspected by his colleague, arrested, and finally relieved of his post. According to Prof. K. Inoue, it was difficult to mobilize the state army to rebel against the reigning emperor.

If so, what is the main factor that led the rebels to victory? Prof. Inoue identifies it in the aristocrats' private retainers' troops. According to him, in actuality, it was powerful aristocrats with powerful *oikos* that played the main role in the revolt. In contrast, he thought that the aristocrats who did not have such *oikos* were not able to play important role at that time. As an evidence of his theory, he paid attention that members of the Dalassenoi did not appear in this revolt.

The Dalassenoi was the powerful military aristocratic family who had

supplied many military commanders in the first half of the 11th century.⁵ However, after the downfall of Konstantinos Dalassenos, suspected of plotting in 1034, and the same fate falling on his brothers Theophylaktos and Romanos due to the same crime and losing their property in circa 1038-1039, the prosperity of this family declined greatly. Prof. Inoue explains the reason why members of the Dalassenoi did not appear in this revolt by the following argument. First possibility is quite simply that they did not actually participate in the revolt. Prof. Inoue rejects this theory because the Dalassenoi had close relations with the Komnenoi and the Doukai, ringleaders of the revolt, and that a member of this family would occupy the important post of military commander in the government of Isaakios I that would be organized after the success of the revolt. So, despite the fact that members of the Dalassenoi did participate in the rebellion, why has their presence not been mentioned?

Prof. Inoue's view is as follows: Ioannes Skylitzes, the principal historian on the rebellion, was supportive of the military aristocrats participating in this intrigue and he attempted to list up all of the participants. In this case, all the leaders of the revolt whom Skylitzes referred to were owners of important *oikos*. It was such aristocrats who had led rebels in the battle of Haides in August 1057. The 'rivaling emperor' Isaakios Komnenos, who commanded the center of the army, had *oikos* in Kastamon, Paphlagonia, where rebels had concentrated. Katakalon Kekaumenos, who commanded the left wing, could mobilize 1,000 private soldiers in Koloneia, his homeland. Romanos Skleros, commander of the right wing, had got involved in a private war with another aristocrat in his homeland in the Anatolikoi in 1042. In addition, the name of Nikephoros Botaneiates, who known to have led private forces as the *doux* of Antioch in 1067 is also mentioned. Prof. Inoue's conclusion is that the ruined Dalassenoi, who had lost their *oikos* and could not play any important role in the revolt, had no value worth mentioning.

If this view is accepted, the power bases of the aristocrats who fomented the revolt would be not in the capital but the provinces, and the basis of their power would not be regular imperial armies stationed in the provinces but their own estates and private soldiers.

I have a number of doubts about Prof. Inoue's view, however. First, is it possible to argue that the regular army was opposed to the aristocrat's private soldiers (that is, the interpretation that while the central government firmly controlled forces stationed in the provinces, the revolting aristocrats could rely only on their private soldiers)? Secondly, had the aristocrats' groups of private soldiers the same close connection to the management of aristocrat *oikos*? If

anything, they seem to have been connected to aristocrats' position as high-ranking military officials. I get this impression because we can confirm that actual private soldiers mentioned in fragmental historical sources were originally foreign mercenaries or prisoners of war, or came from different areas from their master's homeland. It seems more likely that they formed a small guard corps around the aristocrats' role as high-ranking military officers rather than being formed through their connections with the aristocrats' estate management. If this is the case, then thirdly, it is doubtful whether they had the military strength to determine the success of the rebellion as a separate entity from the state armies. Rather, it seems more likely that their existence remained a kind of status symbol of aristocrat's social prestige as a high-ranking military officer. Finally, as a fourth problem, we need to examine if, as Prof. Inoue says, the sheer number of private soldiers (i.e., whether or not the aristocrat in question possessed powerful *oikos*) was main cause determining the importance of rebel leaders, and whether such a condition became the basis of Skylitzes' selection when he named the rebel families. In other words, we need to make clear whether Skylitzes took other elements into consideration when he judged someone as a key figure. For that reason, we must analyze his text in detail. Now, let us try to clarify these problems.

I. Imperial Regular Army and Aristocrat's Private Forces

Is it possible to clearly distinguish aristocrat private forces from the regular imperial army? In my opinion, it is difficult. We cannot disregard the natural feeling of solidarity that existed between military forces stationed in the provinces and aristocrats with estates in the same region.

Let us consider the case with Bryennios that Prof. Inoue used as an example of a failure to take over the regular army.⁶ At that time Bryennios occupied the post of *strategos* of Cappadocia and *strategos-autokrator* of the Makedonian *tagmata*.⁷ Determined to join the rebellion and lacking strong ties with his soldiers, he set about securing his soldiers' support with higher-than regulation pay. His suspicious behavior was noticed by his co-general, Lykanthes, the *strategos* of the Anatolikoi, and he was arrested, and punished by blinding, by Lykanthes.

Reviewing the text referring to this incident, we will find that it was "the Cappadocians" to whom Bryennios tried to pay additional salaries.⁸ If he felt no need of such a procedure with the Makedonian *tagmata* he led from his homeland, it means he must have had strong ties with these troops already.

If this hypothesis is accepted, it seems implausible that Bryennios'

Makedonian troops did not even show any pretense of resistance at his arrest. It is difficult to discuss this point conclusively on the basis of solid documentary sources, but it seems likely that the action of Lykanthes' troupe was so quick (they swiftly surrounded the tent of Bryennios and arrested him) that the Makedonian troops lost their chance to counterattack. Based on that, the arrested Bryennios was blinded immediately, without any request for the emperor's instructions.⁹ It is likely that such precautionary measures were taken because they feared the Makedonian troops would attempt his recapture.

Michael VI's government recognized that generals from Makedonia and the army corps of the same province were connected by strong bonds. When the emperor called up the troops in Makedonia to rebuff the rebels, it was Basileios Tarchaneiotes, a member of the Tarchaneiotai, as powerful as the Bryennioi in Makedonia, that the emperor entrusted the command of this army.¹⁰ In fact, this is the first time that the top post of the Western army was entrusted to an aristocrat from Makedonia. Perhaps the imperial government tried to use of the popularity of the Tarchaneiotai to calm down the shake up that Bryennios' arrest had brought to the Western army.

It is known that two generals, Maurokatakalon and Katzamountes, were in the Makedonian troops under the command of Basileios Tarchaneiotes.¹¹ It is acknowledged that members of the Maurokatakaloι were military commanders playing active parts in Balkans from the latter half of 11th century. There is some circumstantial evidence that this family had a connection with this region. For example, Nikolaos Maurokatakalon had contributed an icon to the church in Adrianople in the 12th Century.¹² Meanwhile, J.-C. Cheynet connects the Katzamountes family with the lineage of a family of certain Koutzomites that participated in Nikephoros Bryennios' (son of Bryennios, rebel of 1057) revolt in 1077. There is no reason to doubt that they also belonged to the local nobility that made Makedonia their homeland.¹³

From these cases, it is likely that regular army stationing in provinces was generally commanded by the group of officers coming from same locality. It seems that powerful aristocrats having their base in the province were able to assert their influence to the regular provincial army through their connections with military officers from the same region although the chief officer of the district was often sent from the central government.

We would like to turn now to the process of troop mobilization by Katakalon Kekaumenos. This case has been thought of as an example of a success story in controlling regular soldiers with severe difficulty. If we examine the text of Skylitzes in detail again, we will find out that the depiction of

dichotomy between the group of private soldiers faithful to the revolting aristocrats and the regular army that was hard to win over is an excessively simplified interpretation. In actuality, a third group, that blurred the boundaries between the first two groups, also existed. Following to Skylitzes' description,¹⁴ we would like to reconstruct Kekaumenos' process of assembling an army, by as follows.

First, he revealed the plot to his dependents and relatives, and gathered 1,000 soldiers. They were the most reliable men, whom Kekaumenos believed they would unconditionally follow him in any situation. Next, he revealed the plan to "men of high reputation of the region" (notables of the region) and, won them to his cause one by one. Then he approached "the people who were braver and more suitable for soldiers" (leading officers of local armies or military aristocrats retiring from military posts at that time, like Kekaumenos?) by a similar method, and added them as his allies. We should notice that Kekaumenos fully divulged his plot, and was securing their cooperation without resorting to any subterfuge.

After that, Kekaumenos fabricated an imperial letter appointing him as commander of the force to subdue the Turks, and called up the army corps of the surrounding regions on that authority. As regards the local corps, those of Koloneia and Chaldia, he urged officers to choose beheading or participation in the plot, and won their support. And for three army corps of foreign mercenaries (one was Russian and the other two, Frankish), he threatened them, bound them by an oath, and forced them to submit to his plan. Next, Kekaumenos put all troops in the vicinity under his command. In addition, "*archontes* and soldiers of Sebasteia, Melitene, Thephrike and the rest of Armenia" gathered under his flag. And the *tagma* of Armeniakoi and leading officers of that *theme* also joined his army on the way to the west.

From the above description, we can confirm that "men of high reputation of the region" (notables of the region) and "the people who were braver and more suitable for soldiers" (ex-soldiers?) existed between Kekaumenos' private army (men obeying his command unconditionally) and the imperial regular army (soldiers whose cooperation was difficult to obtain by the rebels without tricks). We can say with fair certainty that they were ruling elites in the local society and had a huge influence over their people. Therefore, it is clear that if their support could be secured, it would greatly contribute to unification of public sentiment in the region in favor of the revolt. It would not be easy for troops stationed in provinces (as already seen, many of the leading officers came from same region) to disregard such a public sentiment and to remain loyal to the imperial

government.

If we accept that, we can then conclude that Kekaumenos' stratagem forging the emperor's letter was a skillful strategy that aimed to concentrate the various army corps that lay scattered in the vicinity, and to win them over all at once as a group, rather than as a last resort plan thought out because of the difficulty in winning over the regular army. It is clear from the example of Bryennios' arrest that it was a dangerous gamble for a rebel leader to gather noncommittal troops in one place. It seems that Kekaumenos dared such a bold stratagem because he had full confidence of success in the persuasion of military leaders in the provinces, from having obtained the local notables' support.

With the exception of the case of Kekaumenos, Skylitzes was not talking about the actual process of mobilizing the rebel army. However, by reading his description carefully, we can obtain a few fragmentary nuggets of information.

The first is the attitude of Lykanthes, *strategos* of the Anatolikoi. When rebels marching toward the capital arrived at Nikaia, Isaakios Komnenos permitted the evacuation of the officers and enlisted men who hoped to remain loyal to the reigning emperor, Michael VI. We find that Lykanthes, "commanding the *tagmata* of Anatolikoi" appears among three military leaders who ran to Michael VI's camp at this time.¹⁵ Lykanthes, who had arrested Bryennios, was compelled, against his will, to join the rebels by this time. Why was he, the commander of a powerful force, swallowed by the rebels without any resistance? Is it because rebel army grew so large so fast that they could overwhelm his men so quickly? But such a view is hard to imagine if one takes into consideration that the rebels were compelled to break up their revolt earlier than planned and that at the time of the uprising, Kekaumenos' troops had not yet joined. It may be quite likely that he could not help going with the tide as a result of his isolation within his troops. The conditions at that time are demonstrated by a phrase of Skylitzes. When Lykanthes had arrested Bryennios, Skylitzes added the following proviso: "because he (=Lykanthes) did not know of the consultation by *archontes* in the East."¹⁶

As J.-C. Cheynet pointing out, he did not belong to a famous noble family.¹⁷ He may have been one of the "Newcomers", who were promoted by the imperial government of Michael VI, who was trying to exclude members of powerful aristocratic families from important military posts. As a man without ties to local society, he was not bound by vested interests in the region, so it seems that he was a suitable candidate to carry out the wishes of the central government. However, on the other hand, as he was an "outsider" in the region, there was a risk that he might be alienated by leading officials, who for the most part were

men from the region. Actually, he remained excluded from the plot plan, which had been circulating in secret among the powerful aristocrats in the East.

At a stage where the full scope of the revolt had not yet revealed itself, it can be agreed that there was no reason for soldiers of the Anatolikoi to hesitate to arrest Bryennios the "Makedonian", a stranger to them, either. But it is considerably doubtful whether they could take up arms without any hesitation against Skleros and Bourtzes, their co-residents escaped to Kastamon. Rather, the great majority of troops in this district would decide to join to the revolt at the stage where many of the powerful aristocrats in the Anatolikoi had already joined. Commander Lykanthes would not be able to resist the consensus of his troops.

The same point is applicable to the case of Isaakios Komnenos and the troops of Paphlagonia, his homeland. All sources, including Skylitzes, do not mention at all the attitudes of the governor of Paphlagonia, who commanded armies stationed in that province, nor those of his colleagues of Bukellarioi or Opsikioi. In contrast to the case of Lykanthes in Anatolikoi, it was likely that a local army, including chief officials, went over smoothly to the rebels without any friction. There is a circumstantial evidence to prove local society was friendly to the rebels. After the rising of the rebelling army, Isaakios dispatched his family and property to safety in the Pemorissa fortress on the cliff on the banks of the river Halus.¹⁸ Seeing that the ownership of castles by individuals was recognized officially only after the 1070s¹⁹ and that Isaakios didn't occupy any important post in the army at that time, we think that it is not probable he could make use of this fortress in his position as the serving military commander. Therefore, he needed the voluntary support of the defense corps in the castle or the residents in the castle town to use this fortress as a rear base of the rebellion.

In addition, another case can be presented that the bonds between general and his men cultivated during army life did not lose their vitality even after the military relation was ended. Hearing of Isaakios' revolt outbreak, Kosmas, son of Konidiarēs, an ex-soldier, a monk of Mount Galesion, abandoned the monastic life to take part in the rebellion.²⁰

To sum up the above-mentioned considerations, the idea of a clear dichotomy between the private soldiers who were faithful and reliable, and the regular imperial army who were difficult to mobilize, does not accurately reflect reality. In fact, powerful aristocrats were able to assert their influence over the provincial army through various networks, such as their connections with local notables, with officers in the reserves and with serving leading military staff

from their home province. The driving force of revolt was a provincial military corps that was called up by powerful aristocrats from all their social connections, particularly those of blood and homeland.

II. The Reality of the Private Soldiers

Powerful aristocrats servicing as military commanders were often observed to accompany their private militia.²¹ For instance, as Prof. Inoue also points out, Nikephoros Botaneiates, a participant in this revolt, had "his own guard corps" as the *doux* of Antioch in 1067.²² And, preceding this revolt, Katakalon Kekaumenos had fought with the Pechenegs with "his own small band of dependents and relatives" in 1049.²³

As seen above, armed retainers of powerful aristocrats appeared in historical sources as bands guarding their masters as military commanders. We can argue that their existence contributed to the appearance of powerful aristocrats as warriors and to their display of social prestige.

On the other hand, on the basis of the part of the text in which they were mentioned, it is not clear whether they have closely united with the household of the aristocrats. If the powerful aristocrats in Asia Minor who joined the revolt of Isaakios Komnenos had two hats, as high-ranking military officials and as great landowners in the provinces, we can get impression that their private military corps were strongly connecting to the former aspect.

Such an impression seems to be strengthened further by connecting various fragmentary clues. First, most of the retainers whose names can be confirmed were non-Greeks. Alexios Komnenos, serving as military commander, had three non-Greek followers, Tatikios the Turk, Chaskales the Alan and Traulos the "Manichaeon" from Philippopolis.²⁴ At the same time, Isaakios, Alexios' brother, also had an Alan servant called Arabates.²⁵ And, as widely known, Borilos and Germanos, two close advisers of Nikephoros Botaneiates, were "Skythai from Sklavonia" (possibly Bulgarians).²⁶ The historian Bryennios called them "slaves" of Botaneiates and "fellows bought by money."²⁷

Besides, as J.-C. Cheynet pointed out, many of servants were named in Eustathios Boilas' will in the middle of the 11th century and in that of the married couple of Symbatios Pakourianos and Kale in the 1090s had the names of Caucasians or Pechenegs. According to the views of Cheynet, these non-Greek servants of Boilas or Pakourianos were originally prisoners of war.²⁸ And because the father of Tatikios, a faithful servant of Alexios Komnenos, had been a Turkish captive seized by Ioannes Komnenos, Alexios' father,²⁹ Tatikios was the son of a prisoner of war. In the chronicle of the First Crusade, we can see

that Tatikios' nose was injured.³⁰ Assuming that Tatikos' nose was cut off as a captive in childhood, as C.M.Brand suggests,³¹ it is quite likely that he was also ex-slave. As seen earlier, two "Skythai", close advisers of Botaneiates, were also ex-slaves. The core of the band of followers of powerful aristocrats may have been occupied by such non-Greek people as prisoners of war and ex-slaves. In addition, foreign mercenary soldiers such as Alans serving to the Komnenoi brothers would join them.

And even in the case of Greek retainers, their homelands did not necessarily correspond to the location of their master's estate. For example, Goules, a servant of Alexios Komnenos originating from Kastamon, Paphlagonia, came from Cappadocia.³² It was clear that he didn't join the band of Komnenian retainers because of his birth in the latter's estate. Therefore, the most probable place where the two of them met must be in the military organization. In conclusion, it seems that the comment of J.-C. Cheynet referring to the bands of servants of Symbarios Pakoulianos and Eustathios Boilas, "ils n'étaient donc pas recrutés localement et n'entraient pas au service de leur maître par le biais de son influence sur les paysans du lieu,"³³ was widely applicable to the bands of other powerful aristocrats' retainers.

Cheyne assumed, in the following two cases, that the lord of an estate might mobilize his peasants as his band of supporters. One case is that of Basileios Skleros, *patrikios*, and his private vendetta with Prousianos, the *strategos* of Boukellarion, under the reign of Konstantinos VIII (1025-1028).³⁴ W.Seibt, studied the prosopography of the Skleroi, and assumed that the private force of Skleros consisted of his *paroikoi* (dependent peasants).³⁵ Cheynet, a skeptic of this view, pointed out that there was no reference in the sources to assume such a mobilization.³⁶ And, as he pointed out elsewhere, it was evident that impromptu military forces organized from peasants could be no match for the professional army.³⁷ Another case mentioned by Cheynet was that of the future emperor, Basileios I.³⁸ But in this case, as Basileios had joined a band of aristocratic retainers away from his home, we can not recognize from this case that peasants were mobilized to the band of aristocratic retainers through the latter's household.

Of course, such a group of private soldiers formed from the state military organization might be maintained by their master if he was temporarily retired from his military post and had occupied himself to the management of his estate. At that time, this group of private soldiers, as "soldiers of one aristocratic family", had made of a part of latter's household organization. In that case, how strong were such "soldiers of an aristocratic family"? Was the force so strong

that it could influence over the fate of the state? By referring to the study of J.-C. Cheynet, we would like to try and find out the answer to this question. Through an analysis of the wills of Eustathios Boilas and Symbatios Pakourianos, Cheynet reached the following conclusions about the dimensions of their group of retainers: “ces personages d’une rang assez important, Boïlas était hypatos et protospathaire en 1059, Paskourianos, curopalates en 1090, ne disposaient sans doute pas de plus d’une vingtaine de serviteurs males, nombre suffisant pour en imposer sur le plan local, mais pas de nature à inquiéter les autorités.”³⁹

As Cheynet also agreed, these two were not men of the highest class in the state. Therefore, it is easily imaginable that an important figure such as the commander in chief of the army would have taken more followers. But even in a territorial feud between Romanos Skleros and Georgios Maniakes in the *theme* of Anatolikoi which was referred by Prof. Inoue as the example of the quarrel between two powerful owners of *oikos*, Cheynet assessed as “il est inutile de disposer de centaines d’hommes, pour de telles entreprises, toutes provinciales, et il n’y avait pas là matière à inquiéter les autorités imperiales.”⁴⁰

In fact, according to another study of Cheynet, as the forces of one army corps of a *tagma* consisting of professional soldiers were about 500-2000,⁴¹ it will be difficult to imagine that persons away from military posts could maintain private troops of a comparable level to the regular forces for the long term. It would have imposed a large economic burden to keep a great number of non-productive personnel, no matter how wealthy the landowners were. Even for the very powerful aristocrats, it might have been enough to take as many as 50 armed retainers to serve the purpose of bodyguard and to show off their social prestige.

Compared with this, it seems exceptional that forces of 1,000 dependents were mobilized by Katakalon Kekaumenos. According to W. Treadgold, the total forces of Koloneia, separated from the Armeniakoi in about 861, were 3,000.⁴² As a matter of fact, the total forces of this *theme* must have decreased through the process of transformation to professional soldiers. As Skylitzes referred to this troop of Koloneia as a single unit, the forces of this army corps would be 2,000 or less on the basis of Cheynet’s above-mentioned view. In other word, Kekaumenos could collect a force of more than half of the regular army corps in his homeland solely by his own efforts. It might be difficult to assume such mass mobilization unless one supposes that the private troops of his kinsmen were mustered from a wide region beyond the limits of his homeland, or that regular soldiers in Koloneia were also included as his private “retainers”. If other

aristocrats also formed their private soldiers on such a scale, the majority of men eligible for military service would be absorbed by them, and the regular imperial army's existence would have been threatened.

After all, it is reasonable to suppose that aristocrats retiring from the military post and living on their estate only formed comparatively small numbers of retainers groups, which consisted of slave dependants for the most part. They were normally only taking small band of retainers, but in times of emergency, they could win the provincial army to their side by using their networks. This view opposes to that of Prof. Inoue, who insisted that every participant in Isaakios Komnenos' revolt owned powerful *oikos* and only the owners of such *oikos* played the principal roles in the revolt. In that case, we need to look for other factors taking the place of these *oikos*. Focusing on leading members of the revolt, we would like to try and clear up the reasons they could play such important roles.

III. Ringleaders of the Rebellion

According to Prof. Inoue's description, three commanders of the rebelling troops, Isaakios Komnenos, Katakalon Kekaumenos and Romanos Skleros, commanding the central forces, the left wing and the right wing in the battle of Haides respectively, "had an extensive *oikos* and participated in the rebellion with a large number of loyal retainers."⁴³ In his opinion, that was the reason why they were assigned to command the rebel armies. Is this stance really appropriate?

First of all, we need to confirm that the regional distribution of troops composing rebels was reflected in the allocation of such commands. That is to say, it is likely that Isaakios Komnenos, the commander of the central forces, leaded the armies of his homeland Paphlagonia, and Katakalon Kekaumenos, commander of the left wing, Koloneia, Sebasteia, Melitene, Tephrike and other Armenian provinces under his command. It is clear that Romanos Skleros, the commander of the right wing, leads the troops of his homeland Anatolokoi, as Nikephoros Botaneiates, who was also from the same province, joined these troops.⁴⁴ In the next stage, we would like to investigate the real reason that these three people were represented as ringleaders in the rebellion.

It is to Isaakios Komnenos that we first pay attention. As the basis of the argument that Isaakios "had an extensive *oikos* and (...) a large number of loyal retainers", Prof. Inoue points out that the revolting armies had gathered in his *oikos* of Kastamon. However, is this description enough evidence that Isaakios had powerful *oikos*? As a matter of fact, there are no proven documents that

illustrate the scale of Isaakios' estates in Kastamon and how many retainers he could mobilize.

Therefore, why was his estate chosen as the assembly place of the rebels? There are two conceivable reasons. The first reason is that he had already been chosen as a candidate for the emperor taking the lead of the revolting armies at the joint conspiracy in Constantinople. The second reason, however, might possibly be more important: Paphlagonia was the most convenient assembly place for the revolting armies, which would march against the capital after joining up with Kekaumenos' troops, advancing to the west from the eastern frontier zone, and the troops of the aristocrats of Anatolikai such as Skleros and Bourtzes, who had their homeland in the central plateau of Anatolia. Viewed in this light, choosing an assembly place in Bithynia near the capital might have been avoided from the consideration that the rebels might meet with the counteroffensive of the imperial army before making proper preparations.

Next, why did Isaakios Komnenos command the center armies of the rebels? Needless to say, it was his position as the imperial candidate that led him to lead the whole army. In other words, he was given the position of the most important commander because he was in the position of commander in chief of the rebels, and not because he had a grand estate or powerful group of retainers. However, Prof. Inoue's logic would be appropriate in the end if he had been elected as the imperial candidate because he had a distinguished and powerful household. So let us examine from Skylitzes' description the process where by plotting aristocrats elected the imperial candidate.

According to Skylitzes, among all the people who concluded the pact, Kekaumenos obviously seemed to be more suitable for this duty than other men in the matter of his age (γῆρα), his manliness (ἀνδρεία), and his experience (ἐμπειρία).⁴⁵ However, Kekaumenos firmly refused this offer, and instead proposed to elect Isaakios Komnenos in place of him, and all of them agreed to this proposal. If we can believe Skylitzes' statement, the scale of the household organization did not appear in the criteria by which the imperial candidate was chosen. Moreover, it is necessary to keep in mind that Isaakios Komnenos had an important advantage over Katakalon Kekaumenos. Namely, he was born into a noble family who had been granted the favor of Basileios II (r.976-1025). Before this conspiracy, when Komnenos and Kekaumenos had an interview with Emperor Michael VI, it is said that the emperor praised Kekaumenos because he "obtained a position full of honors not because of his ancestors or someone's patronage but because of his own distinguished services."⁴⁶ Taken in another light, this remark might be seen as insulting Isaakios Komnenos, who had

famous ancestors and was treated warmly by successive emperors. There is no doubt that Isaakios Komnenos, as a man of brilliant military career and noble lineage, was more suitable to lead the revolting armies, containing various elements, rather than Kekaumenos, a self-made man.

Next, let us look at Katakalon Kekaumenos. If we are to believe Skylitzes' remarks, he occupied the position next to Komnenos in co-rebels. Moreover, he was a commander-in-chief of troops mobilized from the east frontier zone. So it would be quite natural that the command of the left wing, which would be usually entrusted to the second person in the army, had been granted to him.

Rather, we should note that when dividing the rebels into three geographical parts, as mentioned above, there was no mention of the another participants of the rebellion, with the sole exception of Ioannes Komnenos, brother of Isaakios, as regards Isaakios Komnenos' troops of Paphlagonia, and Kekaumenos' of the east frontier zone. Compared with this, as regards the aristocrats of Anatolikoi, several persons' names were enumerated, as I will describe later. What was the reason for the difference?

In my opinion, as regards the former two groups, it is likely that Skylitzes intended to stress the importance of the roles which Komnenos and Kekaumenos had played in their armies. In other words, he might have enumerated a lot of names as regards the Anatolikoi because such a deliberation was useless. First of all, let us examine Katakalon Kekaumenos concerning this point.

It is well known that the last part of Skylitzes' chronicle reported on Kekaumenos' deeds in detail, and presented itself as if he had been a substantial leading player.⁴⁷ Accordingly to J. Shepard, Skylitzes might have used Kekaumenos' personal memoirs for these parts.⁴⁸ It seems that Skylitzes' descriptions, which exclusively focus on the efforts of Kekaumenos in the process of mobilization of rebelling armies in the surrounding areas of Koloneia, and did not mention any rebels from these regions other than him, might be caused by the character of such an original source.

Next, what can we say about Isaakios Komnenos? As to him, the situation in which Skylitzes wrote his history might seem to have had an influence on his attitude. The hypothesis of S. A. Kame⁴⁹ is very interesting on this point. He pointed out that Skylitzes had stressed a false accusation made against Nikephoros Komnenos for his so-called intrigue in 1026. Kame assumed that Skylitzes, writing his history after the birth of the Komnenian dynasty, had depended on sources friendly to the Komnenos family. The same thing may be said of this historian's stance, which explains in detail the heroic deed of Manuel Erotikos, a grandfather of Alexios I, who was defending Nikaia at the time of the

revolt of Bardas Skleros.⁵⁰

If the hypothesis of Kamer is accepted, it might be very natural to suppose that a similar deliberation functioned when Skylitzes was writing about this revolt, which he placed as the final event of his chronicle and which was a memorable one as it saw the first accession to the throne by a member of the Komnenos family. For Skylitzes, Isaakios Komnenos was an object that should be stressed by all means possible, along with his other hero, Kekaumenos. In proportion to this, other revolting aristocrats in Paphlagonia would fade into the background. Viewed in this light, we can understand why Skylitzes referred to Ioannes Komnenos, Isaakios' brother, so unnaturally. He could not omit the name of the father of the reigning emperor of his time (Alexios I).

In contrast, none of the other aristocratic families around Paphlagonia who were thought to have joined to this rebellion along with the Komnenoi were ever mentioned by Skylitzes. As an example, let us take the case of the brothers, Konstantinos and Ioannes in the Doukas family, who were known as participants in the petitioning of Michael VI in the capital. The elder brother Konstantinos, was likely to have remained in the capital and incited civil uprising, as Prof. Inoue's supposition.⁵¹ On the other hand, the younger brother Ioannes was never mentioned by Skylitzes again, although he might have participated in rebellion as a representative of the Doukas family.

According to S.A. Kamer, Niketas Pegonites, Ioannes Doukas' father-in-law, who also had his homeland in Paphlagonia, appears to have participated in this revolt.⁵² Referring to the article of H.Gregoire⁵³ which he quoted as the basis of his argument, however, it turns out that this view was based on a certain Pizshōnit, who appeared in the text of Matthew of Edessa. However, when reading the original text of Matthew, we find that this Pizshōnit and Liparit, his colleague, were persons who went to give support to the emperor Michael VI, but knowing of the victory of the rebels, submitted to the new emperor.⁵⁴ As Theodoros Pegonites occupied the post of the governor of Edessa under the reign of Konstantinos X, the successor of Isaakios I,⁵⁵ we can confirm that the alliance of the Pegonitai and the Doukai had continued until this time. In this connection, although there was a possibility of participation by the Pegonitai in this revolt, according to our view their participation was never confirmed, which goes against Kamer's supposition.

Skylitzes did not mention the Dokeianoι and the Kontostephanoi, related families of the Komnenoi, either. It is quite likely that the Kontostephanoi which had occupied an important military post under the reign of Konstantinos IX Monomachos (r.1042–1055),⁵⁶ like Isaakios Komnenos and Kekaumenos,

belonged to the group of generals eliminated by the government of Michael VI. Moreover, Kontostephanos, a nephew of the emperor, had borne the high title of *magistros* under the reign of Isaakios I.⁵⁷ Viewed in this light, it seems quite probable that the Kontostephanoi had joined to this rebellion. However, Skylitzes ignored their existence. The same applies to the case of Theodoros Dokeianos, whose mother was a sister of Isaakios Komnenos and who bore also the title of *magistros* under the latter's reign.⁵⁸

Various families, such as the Pegonitai, the Kontostephanoi and the Dokeianoi, whose properties had not confiscated by the authorities in contrast with the Dalassenoi, and had thus been able to keep the stable households, left no traces in the descriptions of Skylitzes. In this case, we must be aware of the reasoning of Skylitzes, who tried to stress Isaakios Komnenos' prominent position in the Paphlagonia. From this viewpoint, it seems it was not very surprising that the Dalassenoi had not been mentioned. From what has been discussed above, we can conclude that the lack of powerful *oikos* was not a decisive factor in their absences. It was established beforehand that all aristocrats around Paphlagonia, other than the Komnenoi, were destined to be ignored by Skylitzes whether they had powerful *oikos* or not.

However, Skylitzes referred to several persons' names regarding the aristocrats of Anatolikoi, because they had no connections to such regulations. Thus, when he talked about the escape of the aristocrats of the Anatolikoi to Kastamon, he noted the names of "*proedros* Romanos Skleros, Bourtzes, Botaneiates and sons of Basileios Argyros."⁵⁹

In that case of the aristocrats of Anatolikoi, why was the command of the right wing of the rebels entrusted to Romanos Skleros as their head? Prof. Inoue insists as usual that the private military forces of Skleros in his estates were a decisive factor.⁶⁰ However, W. Seibt presents another account regarding this point.⁶¹ According to Seibt, Skleros was given the key role because he had borne the highest title in the rebels. In fact, while his title was *proedros*, as mentioned above, Isaakios Komnenos and Katakalon Kekaumenos were only *magistros* at that time.

In this connection, we perceive the curious fact regarding the description of Skylitzes concerning Romanos Skleros. In Skylitzes' text, Skleros does not appear in the description of the petition of the generals to the emperor in 1057. Skleros would be mentioned at the top of the list of escaping aristocrats for the first time in the above-mentioned description, in which Skylitzes reports the total evacuation of the aristocrats of Anatolikoi to Isaakios Komnenos' estate. In this case, Skylitzes added the clarification as for Skleros, as follows: "because he (=

Skleros) was not excluded from the people exchanging the oath.”⁶²

Perhaps it seems that Romanos Skleros had been one of the plotting members from the first. However, given that Skylitzes does not refer to his presence among the members of the petitioning generals in the spring, and mentions him at the break up of the rebellion for the first time, what was behind this difference? Almost certainly, it is his high title. Skylitzes had a habit of listing people in order of their titles when he needed to list several peoples' names. I would like to give a few examples. It was “*magistros* Isaakios Komnenos, *magistros* Katakalon Kekaumenos, *vestarches* Michael Bourtzes and Konstantinos and Ioannes, descendents of the eastern branch of the Doukai” who petitioned the emperor in 1057.⁶³ According to Skylitzes, the envoy dispatched to the rebels by the emperor Michael VI consisted of “*proedros* Konstantinos Leichoudes, *proedros* Theodoros Alopas, Konstantinos Psellos, *hypatos* of philosophers.”⁶⁴ In the same way, when Skylitzes listed the names of senators who had roused themselves to action in the capital, he referred to them in order of “*magistros* Michael, the son of Anastasios, *patrikios* Theodoros Chryserios, *patrikios* Christophoros Pyrros.”⁶⁵

Therefore, if Romanos Skleros had appeared in the petition to the emperor Michael VI in the spring of 1057 according to this custom, Skylitzes would be compelled to place Skleros at the top of the generals. In addition, it was possible that Romanos Skleros might have been a real leader of the generals at this stage. However, such a scheme was extremely inconvenient for Skylitzes, who wanted to represent Isaakios Komnenos and Katakalon Kekaumenos as the leaders of generals. So it is likely that Skylitzes deliberately said nothing of Skleros' presence at first, and only finally referred to him after the breaking up of the revolt.

I would like to summarize the findings obtained from these considerations.

The first point we can note is that the three commanders leading rebelling armies were representatives of the three regions that supplied forces to the rebels. The troops of Paphlagonia and the surrounding area entered under the command of Isaakios Komnenos. Katakalon Kekaumenos led the armies of Koloneia and the Armenian provinces of the eastern frontier zone. And it was an army in the Anatolikoi, his homeland, that Romanos Skleros led.

The second point, we can note is division of the participants of the rebellion into the three above-mentioned groups. While there were no mentions of aristocratic families other than Komnenos and Kekaumenos with regards Paphlagonia and Koloneia, it is only for the Anatolikoi that several mentions were confirmed. On this point we need to discern the tactics of Skylitzes, who

tried to stress the prominent positions of Komnenos and Kekaumenos for the former two groups.

As the third point, it is impossible to demonstrate the view that assumes the possession of a powerful household organization as the reason to choose the three aristocrats as representatives of each region, at least based on historical sources. It was a consequence of consideration of numerous conditions, such as age, military career, and popularity that Isaakios Komnenos and Katakalon Kekaumenos were recommended as the candidate for emperor. The number of private soldiers whom they disposed was not counted in this case. In the same way, there is no evidence to prove that Romanos Skleros had a powerful band of private soldiers compared with other aristocrats in the Anatolikoi. On the other hand, it was clear that he surpassed the other aristocrats of the Anatolikoi due to his honorary title.

The Rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos: a Conclusion

Finally, let us summarize the entire argument.

In this rebellion, it was not the aristocrats' private soldiers that formed the main force of the rebels. It was regular armies stationed in provinces connected through various networks with the revolting aristocrats of Asia Minor that played the main role, and the greater part of the troops which brought victory to the rebels in the battle of Haides probably consisted of the regular army.

On the other hand, it seems that the role of the aristocrats' private soldiers was extremely limited. Based on various circumstantial evidence, it is possible that their role might not have exceeded that of master's bodyguard.

Our final conclusion is that the number of aristocrats' private soldiers was not the decisive factor in selecting the leaders of the revolting armies. Certainly, it is impossible to prove it from historical sources. The rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos was the one of generals who could mobilize military forces stationed in Asia Minor. The precedence of leaders in the rebellion greatly depended on their careers in the state apparatus, such as their honorary titles and past military exploits. On the other hand, we could not determine any evidence that the scale of their household was considered.

Notes

¹ G.Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des byzantinischen Staats*, 3ed., Munich, 1963, 279-280.

² S.A.Kamer, *Emperors and Aristocrats in Byzantium, 976-1081*, Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1983, 310-333.

³ J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs et contestations à Byzance (963-1210)*, Paris, 1990, 68-70, 339-344.

- ⁴ K. Inoue, "The Rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos and the Provincial Aristocratic *Oikoi*", *Byzantinoslavica*, 54 (1993), 268-278.
- ⁵ Cf. J.-C. Cheynet, "Trois familles du duché d'Antioche", dans J.-C. Cheynet et J.-F. Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, Paris, 1986, 7-122, 75-115.
- ⁶ K. Inoue, "The Rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos", 1993, 272f; Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed., H. Thurn, Berlin, 1973, 484, 487f.
- ⁷ Ioannes Skylitzes, 484.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 488.
- ⁹ *Idem.*
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 494; I.G. Leontiades, *Die Tarchaneiotai: Eine prosopographisch-sigilographische Studie*, Thessaloniki, 1998, No.3, 38-41.
- ¹¹ Ioannes Skylitzes, 495.
- ¹² J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs et contestations* 233, n.237.
- ¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 233.
- ¹⁴ Ioannes Skylitzes, 490-491.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 492.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 488.
- ¹⁷ J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs et contestations*, 342, n.28.
- ¹⁸ Ioannes Skylitzes, 492. We find from the following Michael Psellos' letter that Pemorissa was not a simple fortress but a small town having inhabitants. Michael Psellos, *Scripta minora*, ed. E. Kurtz & F. Drexel, 2 vols, Milan, 1936-1941, vol.2, 124.
- ¹⁹ Cf. N. Oikonomides, "The Donation of Castles in the Last Quarter of the 11th Century", *Polychronion. Festschrift Franz Dölger zum 75 Geburtstag*, Heiderberg, 1966, 413-417.
- ²⁰ *Vie de Saint Lazare le Galésiot*, *Acta Sanctorum Nov. III*, Bruxelles, 1910, 538; R.P.H. Greenfield ed. *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, Washington, D.C., 2000, 188.
- ²¹ Cf. G. Ostrogorsky, "Observations on the Aristocracy in Byzantium", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 25 (1971), 1-32, esp.12-14.
- ²² Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed., I. Bekker, Bonn, 1853, 96.
- ²³ Ioannes Skylitzes, 469.
- ²⁴ Y. Nezu, "The Private Retinue of Alexios Komnenos" (in Jap.), *Journal of the Faculty of Humanities, Toyama University*, 19, 1993, 45-71, 49-57.
- ²⁵ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Historiarum libri quattuor*, ed., P. Gautier, Bruxelles, 1975, 63.
- ²⁶ Anne Comnène, *Alexiade*, éd., B. Leib et P. Gautier, 4 vols, Paris, 1937-1976, vol.1, 57, 64.
- ²⁷ Nikephoros Bryennios, 59.
- ²⁸ J.-C. Cheynet, "L'aristocratie byzantine (VIII^e-XIII^e s.)", *Journal des savants*, juillet-décembre, 2000, 281-322, 312.
- ²⁹ Anne Comnène, vol.1, 151.
- ³⁰ Raymond d'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*, ed. J.H. Hill & L.L. Hill, Philadelphia, 1968, 36.
- ³¹ Ch. M. Brand, "The Turkish Element in Byzantium, Eleventh-Twelfth Centuries", *Dumbarton Oaks Studies*, 43 (1989), 1-25, esp. 3.
- ³² Nikephoros Bryennios, 291; Anne Comnène, vol.1, 33.
- ³³ J.-C. Cheynet, "L'aristocratie byzantine", 312.
- ³⁴ Ioannes Skylitzes, 372.
- ³⁵ W. Seibt, *Die Skleroi: Eine prosopographisch-sigilographische Studie*, Wien, 1976, 65. To borrow Seibt's phrase: "Paröken bzw. Gefolgsleute des Großgrundbesitzers, die dieser bewaffnet hat".
- ³⁶ J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs et contestations*, 40, n.1.
- ³⁷ J.-C. Cheynet, "L'aristocratie byzantine", 312, n.131.
- ³⁸ J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs et contestations*, 305, n.16.
- ³⁹ J.-C. Cheynet, "L'aristocratie byzantine", 312.

- ⁴⁰ J.-C. Cheynet, "L'aristocratie byzantine", 313f; Ioannes Skylitzes, 427.
- ⁴¹ J.-C. Cheynet, "Les effectifs de l'armée byzantine aux X^e-XII^e s.", *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale, X^e-XII^e siècles*, 38, 1995, 319-335, 326.
- ⁴² W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army, 284-1081*, Stanford, 1995, 76.
- ⁴³ K. Inoue, "The Rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos", 273.
- ⁴⁴ In this battle, Botaneiates combated with Randoulph the Frank who belonged to the left wing of the imperial armies. Ioannes Skylitzes, 495f
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 487.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 483.
- ⁴⁷ A. Kazhdan, "The Social View of Michael Attaleiates", in A. Kazhdan, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh & Twelfth Centuries*, Cambridge, 1984, 23-86, 66.
- ⁴⁸ J. Shepard, "A Suspected Source of Scylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*: the Great Catacalon Cecaumenos", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 16 (1992), 171 -181.
- ⁴⁹ S.A. Kamer, *Emperors and Aristocrats*, 165-168, n.28.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 166, n.28
- ⁵¹ K. Inoue, "The Rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos", 274.
- ⁵² S.A. Kamer, *Emperors and Aristocrats*, 317.
- ⁵³ H. Grégoire, "Du nouveau sur l'histoire bulgare-byzantine. Nicéas Pégonitas, vainqueur du roi bulgare Jean Vladislav", *Byzantion*, 12 (1937), 283-291, 291. As regards to Eirene Pegonitissa, the wife of Ioannes Doukas: A. Sideras, *Die byzantinische Grabreden. Prosopographie, Datierung, Überlieferung 142 Epitapien und Monodien aus dem byzantinischen Jahrtausend*, Wien, 1994, 138-140.
- ⁵⁴ *Armenia and the Crusade: the Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, tr. by A. Dostourian, Lanham-New York, 1993, 70.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.
- ⁵⁶ J.-C. Cheynet, "Les ducs d'Antioche sous Michel IV et Constantin IX", in C. Sode & S. Takaos ed., *Novum Millennium: Studies on Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to P. Speck*, Aldershot, 2001, 53-63, esp. 57-60.
- ⁵⁷ P. Gautier, "Basilikoi logoi inédits de Michel Psellos", *Siculorum Gymnasium*, 33, N.2 (1980), 761, n.57.
- ⁵⁸ K.N. Sathas ed., *Bibliotheca graeca medii aevi*, V, Venice-Paris, 1876, 433.
- ⁵⁹ Ioannes Skylitzes, 488.
- ⁶⁰ K. Inoue, "The Rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos", 273f.
- ⁶¹ W. Seibt, *Die Skleroi. Eine prosopographisch-sigillographische Studie*, Wien, 1976, 80-81.
- ⁶² Ioannes Skylitzes, 488.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 483. Skylitzes did not refer to the title of Konstantinos Doukas but we know that he bore the title of *vestarches* at that time. cf. Michael Attaleiates, 56.
- ⁶⁴ Ioannes Skylitzes, 496.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 498.